

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY-BELLEVUE MEDICAL CENTER
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

477 FIRST AVENUE, NEW YORK 16, N.Y.

DEPARTMENT OF PHARMACOLOGY

January 27, 1955

OREGON 9-3200

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Department of Genetics
College of Agriculture
The University of Wisconsin
Madison 6, Wisconsin

Dear Josh:

Enclosed is a copy of the note I sent to Plumb along with a copy of the last version of our joint communication. I'm very pleased that you agree that this is a desirable procedure. If I get any answer from Plumb or have a visit from him I'll keep you informed.

I presume that "ACLU" in your last letter refers to the American Civil Liberties Union. It happens that I have an application blank on my desk which I'll fill out right now. You may consider that you've made a sale!

With respect to the Detroit meeting, I think I have already indicated that I was responsible for getting the committee to invite you. I realize that your work has been so purely genetic~~al~~ that one might question whether you would be an appropriate speaker at a biochemical symposium. However, as I conceive it, a major function of this meeting is to get an exchange of information and ideas between some distinguished enzymologists and some distinguished students of cellular physiology (including physiological geneticists). Since I know your reading and interests extend far beyond what one might call the geography of the gene, I was hoping you might care to give a critical evaluation, in terms that enzymologists would understand, of the present state of the problem of gene function. I would think, for instance, that it would be very good to have Norm Horowitz's defence of the one-gene-one-enzyme hypothesis balanced by a critical, analytical account of the ambiguities of this notion and the various criticisms that have been leveled at it. And I would think that a much more objective version of this problem could be produced by you than by a passionate antagonist such as Bonner or Mitchell. In addition, it would seem to me very desirable if the audience would have spelled out to them, in words of not too many syllables, the problems raised by the fact that genes defined as crossover units are no longer congruous with genes defined as functional units. I realize that you do not specialize in elementary expositions; but since this is an area in which, to the best of my knowledge, you have not been writing in detail, I thought you might like to put together an essay along these lines, and might also get some pleasure out of the rest of the program.

Sincerely,



Bernard D. Davis

January 27, 1955

January 26, 1955

Mr. R. K. Plumb
New York Times
New York 36, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Plumb:

Enclosed is a copy of a letter to your editor which Dr. Joshua Lederberg and I wrote while at Woods Hole last summer. This letter was never sent because we learned from Dr. Eagle that he had not accepted an invitation to discuss his paper with the press, and so it did not seem appropriate to send the editor a letter that was so critical of the reporter. Meanwhile we returned to our respective institutions and did not find it feasible to modify the letter suitably by exchange of correspondence.

It now seems clearly too late to draw this issue to the editor's attention. I am communicating with you, however, because I have since seen a number of excellent reports by you on other topics, and so I thought you might want to know that your news report on the Rutgers dedication, in contrast, was considered thoroughly unsatisfactory and disturbing by all of the many biologists with whom I discussed it. Dr. Lederberg joins me in the decision to send you the enclosed letter, which sets forth briefly the reasons for this dissatisfaction.

If you would care to have a discussion of this issue, or of general ones concerning relations between scientists and the press, I would welcome a visit from you. I am very much interested in the problem of informing the public on scientific matters, and I would particularly like an opportunity to explain to you, in greater detail than was possible in the enclosed letter, what is so disturbing in the pseudo-scientific Lysenkoist doctrine.

Sincerely yours,

Bernard D. Davis

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg

cc: Dr. Joshua Lederberg